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# **Soviet Short-Term Options in South Asia**

MORI/CDE

**Special National Intelligence Estimate**

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## SOVIET SHORT-TERM OPTIONS IN SOUTH ASIA

Information as of 5 January 1982 was  
used in the preparation of this Estimate.

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THE NATIONAL FOREIGN INTELLIGENCE BOARD CONCURS.

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The Central Intelligence Agency, the Defense Intelligence Agency, the National Security Agency, and the intelligence organizations of the Departments of State and Treasury.

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## KEY JUDGMENTS

Over the next six to 12 months, the situation in Afghanistan will remain the Soviet Union's most pressing problem in South Asia.

The Soviet military intervention has demonstrated Moscow's willingness to use force in support of even a fragile ally—the Karmal regime—and has improved the Soviets' military potential in the region. On the other hand, the Soviets continue to pay a political price for this intervention, including Pakistan's pursuit of closer ties with the United States and China and China's campaign to improve relations with India.

Moscow's military presence has preserved the Kabul regime and enabled it to keep tenuous control of major cities. However, the popular base of that regime is narrower than it was in December 1979, Afghan Army capabilities have declined, and the security situation is worse.

In September, the Soviets sent a high-level mission to Kabul to take stock of the situation and, in November, they began sending in additional forces, now numbering about 5,000. Most, if not all, of these men probably will perform security functions, thus freeing maneuver elements already in the country for combat operations. The Soviets simultaneously have improved their air defense and communications capabilities in eastern Afghanistan.

We are not certain if the Soviets have completed their reinforcement, but we do not believe that it will exceed 10,000 to 15,000 men—bringing the total Soviet force level in Afghanistan to some 100,000. If they combine this augmentation with increases in Soviet combat operations—which could include some increased use of chemical weapons—they may improve the security of their own supply lines and somewhat reduce insurgent capabilities near the cities.

Moscow will accompany these military efforts with attempts to create a more effective Afghan leadership, but no Soviet-backed alterations are likely to improve the regime's standing with the people. The Soviets will also continue to feign interest in international negotiations largely as a tactic to obtain recognition of the Karmal government, but will remain unwilling to create a genuinely autonomous government or withdraw their forces.

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The Soviets continue to consider Pakistan's support for the Afghan insurgents a major factor in sustaining the resistance. They are likely to intensify pressure on Pakistan during the next year, stepping up cross-border operations and, possibly, increasing assistance to internal Pakistani groups opposed to President Zia. They simultaneously will hold out inducements to Islamabad to demonstrate the advantages of accommodation.

The Soviets will continue their attempts to manipulate India's historical enmity toward Pakistan and its concern about Pakistan's improving military capabilities. They might urge India to strengthen further its forces along the Indo-Pakistan frontier and initiate intermittent border incidents to distract Pakistan and prevent it from strengthening its forces along the Afghan-Pakistani border. Soviet encouragement will have little impact, however, unless the Indians, for their own reasons, decide to move against Pakistan.

We believe that none of the USSR's probable actions, either alone or in combination, will significantly improve its overall position in Afghanistan. Therefore, within the year, we expect the Soviets again to face the difficult choice of further augmenting their forces in Afghanistan. Their decision then, as now, will be determined not only by the situation within Afghanistan, but also by Soviet domestic developments and the international environment—especially the situation in Poland.

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